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FM AMEMBASSY BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN
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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUSICWP/COMLOGWESTPAC PRIORITY
RHHMHAA/COMPACFLT PEARL HARBOR HI PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 000156

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MTS
SINGAPORE FOR DAO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/22/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [BX](#)

SUBJECT: BRUNEI ROYALS STRESS IMPORTANCE OF U.S. ROLE IN
SOUTHEAST ASIA

REF: A) BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 129 B) BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 153

Classified By: Classified by Amb. Emil Skodon, reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In the Ambassador's farewell calls, Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah, Crown Prince Al Muhtahdee Billah, and Acting Foreign Minister Princess Masna emphasized that Brunei welcomes and recognizes the importance of a robust U.S. presence in Southeast Asia and desires a close bilateral relationship with the United States. Strengthening bilateral defense cooperation is a priority for the Sultan. Over the longer term, he supports the increase in Bruneians studying in the U.S. as an important step in developing deeper and broader people-to-people ties. Reflecting on their warm personal relationship, the Sultan said he was looking forward to seeing President Bush at the next APEC leaders meeting. The Crown Prince said he was considering attending the UN General Assembly session this fall. Should that visit take place, the Crown Prince would welcome meetings with appropriate USG officials in New York or Washington. We can best respond to these positive overtures from the royal family by tailoring our diplomatic and military engagement to meet Brunei's limited, but growing capacity to work with us in the region. END SUMMARY.

More Defense Cooperation Sought

¶2. (C) The Ambassador, accompanied by DCM, paid a farewell call on Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah on May 19. His Majesty thanked the Ambassador for his role in building stronger bilateral ties. The Sultan welcomed the American presence in Southeast Asia, saying that it was "important for the region." He saw bilateral military exercises as helpful in developing the skills of the Royal Brunei Armed Forces and as an important symbol of U.S. engagement. In that context, the Sultan said that he hoped defense cooperation could continue to grow.

"Our Close Friend"

13. (C) The Ambassador discussed the long-standing commitment of the U.S. to the region. He noted that one symbol of our commitment to Brunei would be the construction of a new U.S. embassy compound, which would commence following the Sultan's required approval for the transfer of title to the site we had recently purchased. The Sultan said that he supported the new embassy construction, saying "You are welcome. America is our close friend."

Most-ever Students in U.S.

14. (C) The Ambassador congratulated Brunei on placing a cadet in the U.S. Air Force Academy class of 2013. He observed that the 30 Bruneians now studying in the U.S. marked the highest such number since Brunei's independence. The Sultan said that he was proud of the new Air Force Academy cadet and of the Brunei cadet at West Point (class of 2009). Recognizing that Brunei was competing against the best in the world for a limited number of slots at the U.S. service academies, the Sultan hoped that Brunei could respond to the challenge to find a suitable candidate for Annapolis that PACOM Commander Admiral Keating had laid down during his recent visit. Looking to the future of this and other people-to-people exchanges, the Sultan said "We want to send more men to America."

Looking forward to Seeing President Bush

15. (C) The Sultan commented that he welcomed his warm personal relationship with President Bush and looked forward to seeing him at the next APEC leaders meeting. The Sultan hoped this good relationship would continue with the next U.S. president. Responding to the Sultan's question about who would win the U.S. election, the Ambassador noted that this was up to the American people to decide but that all the leading candidates for the U.S. Presidency had personal experience with and affinity for Southeast Asia, a point His Majesty welcomed.

Crown Prince to UNGA

16. (C) In a May 15 farewell call on Crown Prince Al Muhtadee Billah, His Highness asked about the general state of bilateral relations and, following the Ambassador's summary response, expressed support for the further strengthening of trade, mil-to-mil relations, and educational exchanges. He told the Ambassador that he tentatively planned to travel to New York in September to attend the UN General Assembly session. The Ambassador encouraged the Crown Prince to take advantage of that trip to meet with Brunei students studying in the U.S. and to visit major American exporters to Brunei. The Crown Prince said that should the visit firm up, he would like to meet with senior USG officials in either New York or Washington. NOTE: The Crown Prince did not mention the lawsuit against him in a New York court that caused him to cancel his previous proposed trip to UNGA, but alluded to it by saying that he was supposed to go to UNGA before but the government decided to send someone else instead. END NOTE.

Acting ForMin Well-Briefed on Bilateral Relations

17. (C) On May 21 Ambassador paid a final farewell call on the Sultan's sister Princess Masna, Ambassador at Large in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in her capacity as Acting Foreign Minister. The impressively well-briefed Acting ForMin ran down a detailed list of bilateral activities during the Ambassador's tour, including the joint Brunei-U.S. tsunami recovery project in Aceh, and expressed her support for stronger Brunei-U.S. relations. She identified environmental protection, educational exchanges,

and cultural programs as potential areas for even closer cooperation.

COMMENT: Engage at Brunei's Pace

17. (C) The Sultan chose to use the Ambassador's farewell call to reemphasize the theme we heard during the visit of Admiral Keating (ref A), that he views a strong U.S. presence in Southeast Asia as a critical stabilizing factor for the region. The steady intensification of our bilateral mil-to-mil relationship and signals we are getting that Brunei would like to continue on this path (ref B) are indicative of Brunei's cautious and measured emergence as a more outward-looking, active regional actor. As Brunei looks to raise its contribution to the Mindanao monitoring mission and pursues the enhancement of its humanitarian assistance and disaster response capabilities, we can best support its maturation as a regional actor through customizing our diplomatic and military engagement to match this small nation's limited, but growing absorptive capacities in ways that contribute to the furtherance of U.S. interests.

SKODON